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ABSTRACT

The history and organization of a community college program in French, Spanish, and German language instruction for gifted elementary school children are described. The collaborative effort of the college and school districts, funded by the Federal Government and the Gifted Students Institute, provided 21 elementary teachers with methods training and language skill development through a workshop and internship. The teachers now form a pool of expertise from which the college can draw to staff its increasing numbers of children's language classes, both on campus and at local schools. Measures of the program's effectiveness indicate measurable gains in participating teachers' language skills, gains in teachers' ratings of their own language skills, increases in knowledge of language teaching methods, and enhanced interest in teaching languages to children. (MSE)

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SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION BY CHILDREN:

A REVIEW OF TWELVE YEARS AT TARRANT COUNTY JUNIOR COLLEGE

Paper presented at the Fourth Annual Advocates for Language Learning Conference, October 16-19, 1987, Washington, DC

by
Jane Harper and Madeleine Lively

Psycholinguistic research and common sense both tell us that the earlier a person begins to study a second language and the longer period of time that he or she spends in the study of the language the greater the possibility that the individual will gain a useful command of that language. At the current time in Texas, few language classes are offered to students before their entrance into high school; exceedingly few opportunities exist for second language study in the elementary grades.

Research also indicates that, if students are to become proficient in a new language, they must hear the language extensively before attempting to speak it, they must receive accurate and comprehensible input, and they must feel secure enough to risk trying to produce language. Unfortunately, few teachers in elementary and junior high schools are proficient enough in a second language to provide quality foreign language instruction needed by students at that level. Most teachers in those grades did not major in a foreign language; indeed, only a few have as many as four semesters of language courses on their transcript. Of those, most have never possessed good speaking skills; others have lost their oral proficiency while teaching other subjects; still others cannot provide a secure environment because of their own insecurity in speaking the language.

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During the last several years parents of elementary children have become more vocal in their demand for foreign language instruction for their children. Beginning in 1975 Tarrant County Junior College Northeast Campus responded to these requests.

HISTORY OF THE TCJC PROGRAM

Actually, the work began two years before any courses were offered on campus. In 1973-74 the faculty of the Department of Foreign Languages did a study of all elementary language programs in the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex, visiting classes and examining curricula. Very few programs were located, these primarily in expensive private schools.

The following year a team of faculty members at TCJC developed the course of study for French and Spanish. They decided to offer four twelve-hour semesters with classes to meet one afternoon per week during the fall and spring and twice each week during the two summer terms. The program was organized around vocabulary topics. Materials for twenty-four topics were developed so that six topics could be studied each semester on a rotating basis. Instructional materials such as drawings for slides, flash cards, pictorial evaluation sheets, puzzles, and crafts were designed; songs were selected and recorded for each unit of instruction; and parent papers were produced.

During 1975-76 the first classes were taught. During the first year two classes of Spanish and one class of French were offered fall and

spring. Larger summer enrollments permitted the offering of three Spanish sections and two of French.

The next year, 1976-77, saw the addition of German to the program. Although many of the slides and flash cards were adaptable for German, many new print materials, such as puzzles and parent papers, and tapes were required for this new part of the curriculum.

During the following four years, 1977-78 through 1980-81, we made few changes in the program. The courses were listed in each Continuing Education schedule of classes. Depending on enrollments, we taught three or four classes each long semester and four to six classes each of the two summer terms.

In 1981 we began delivering publicity letters about this program to a number of the private schools and "after-school care centers" near the campus. A significant increase in enrollments occurred, resulting in the addition of several sections each semester during the next two years.

In 1984 several area public school districts agreed to distribute letters containing schedules of these classes. During the following three years the enrollments soared. With the addition of Italian to the curriculum, twelve to fifteen sections were filled each semester.

In the spring of 1987, the Talented and Gifted Program in Arlington Independent School District agreed to distribute our letters with a cover letter in which their administrators endorsed our courses. Again the

enrollment on campus increased with eighteen sections filled.

During the fall semester, 1987, more than four hundred children were enrolled in thirty-two classes of foreign languages for children through Tarrant County Junior College.

SCHOOL/COLLEGE COLLABORATIVE

The latest developments in this program are more important than simply increasing enrollments. During the summer of 1987, TCJC received a grant from the Education for Economic Security Act, Title II, and funds from the Gifted Students Institute headquartered in Fort Worth, to support a Language Development Workshop and Internship to train additional teachers for this growing population and to get the instruction closer to the children.

With grant funds the College offered a workshop for twenty-one prospective teachers of foreign languages, selected from elementary teachers who had some education and/or experience in a second language and who were interested in enhancing the international focus of their curriculum through the incorporation of foreign language and cultural information. For three weeks these teachers developed skills in oral language communication and in contemporary foreign language instructional methodologies, including Total Physical Response, Natural Approach, and Color Connection. Following the instructional phase, the teachers participated in three weeks of an observation internship in a model program

of eighteen sections of French, German, and Spanish for children scheduled in Arlington for this purpose.

Arlington Independent School District graciously provided an elementary school building for the model classes for children used for the internship. The eighteen sections (11 in Spanish, 4 in French, and 3 in German) were offered daily during a three-week period in the facility, taught by TCJC part-time instructors who were experienced in teaching languages for children and who teach regularly in the TCJC program of languages for children.

Pre- and post-assessments of oral communication abilities, using ACTFL-certified oral proficiency interviewers, showed measurable gains in oral language skills by the teacher-participants. Table I shows the Oral Proficiency ratings of the participants at the beginning and at the close of the Language Development Workshop.

TABLE I

ORAL INTERVIEW RATINGS OF PARTICIPANTS

	French		German		Spanish		Total	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Novice Low	1*						1*	
Novice Mid	3				4	2	7	2
Novice High		3	1		2	4	6	7
Intermediate Low			1		2	1	3	1

Intermediate Mid					1	1	1	2	2
Intermediate High					1	2	3	3	4
Advanced						1	1	1	1
Advanced Plus						1	1	1	1
Superior	1	1				1	1	2	2

*This participant did not do the post-test interview.

While the actual change in oral proficiency skills ofthe participants is of primary importance in evaluating the success of theworkshop and internship, the participants' perception of their listening comprehension and speaking skills is of similar importance. One must have confidence in his/her ability to understand and to be understood before being willing to risk speaking. Therefore, one of the main objectives of the Language Development Workshop was to increase the security and confidence of the participants in speaking their second language.

Table II shows the average gains in confidence in each language and in the total group in speaking and in listening comprehension. The scores are based on a scale of 1 to 5.

TABLE II

CONFIDENCE IN LANGUAGE ABILITY OF PARTICIPANTS

	French		German		Spanish		Total	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Speaking	2.27	3.79	1.91	3.68	2.91	3.26	2.65	3.39
Understanding	2.53	3.92	2.69	4.38	3.11	3.52	2.92	3.67

Additional objectives of the project centered around the development of new skills in current foreign language methodologies appropriate for young students, particularly in Total Physical Response, the Natural Approach, and the Color Connection materials development. Table III shows the gains in information made by the participants in each of these instructional areas. The scores are based on a scale of 1 to 5.

TABLE III

DEVELOPMENT OF METHODOLOGIES AND MATERIALS BY PARTICIPANTS

	Pre	Post	Change
Total Physical Approach	2.07	4.45	2.38
Natural Approach	2.18	4.21	2.03
Color Connection	1.74	4.27	2.53

In addition, interest in teaching languages to children was enhanced. Nine of the twenty-one participants expressed a desire to teach in the program of Languages for Children directed by the Department of Foreign Languages of TCJC Northeast Campus. During the two semesters following the workshop, six of the twenty-one participants are already teaching sections of these courses for the College.

The administration of Arlington ISD was pleased with the schedule which offered classes in the school district. Therefore, during the fall semester, 1987, nineteen of the thirty-two classes scheduled by the College

were offered during after-school hours on two elementary school campuses in Arlington. The same number of sections were also offered during the spring, 1988, using as faculty the teachers trained during the funded workshop.

CONCLUSION

One of the goals of talented and gifted programs in the public schools is to provide instruction in foreign languages at the elementary school level. Due to the standard problems of budgetary constraints, full-day curriculum demands, lack of appropriate and necessary instructional materials, and inadequacy of training of faculty, no progress had been made toward this goal in the area around TCJC. Because of the history of the College in language instruction for children, the public school administrators looked toward TCJC for assistance with this goal.

Through a grant from EESA, Title II, and funds from the Gifted Students Institute, twenty-one elementary teachers were trained in methodology while their language skills were improved in a workshop and internship. These teachers now form a pool of expertise from which the College can draw to staff the increasing numbers of classes in languages for children, on campus and at the schools of the collaborating school districts.

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Opinions, findings, and conclusions expressed herein do not necessarily reflectthe position or policy of the Coordinating Board, Texas College and University System, or the U.S. Education Department, and no official endorsement should be inferred.